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Oral history interview with Michail Zاراftis

Summary

Michail Zاراftis, born in 1929 in Simi, an island in the south-eastern Aegean sea, just north of the island of Rhodes, describes his experience as a Greek Christian during the German occupation, 1940 - 1945. His family: father, mother, three sons and a daughter, started their life in Simi, but when the father died, the young, very poor family moved to Rhodes for better opportunities. They occupied a wooden hut on Tripolemou Street, very close to the Jewish neighborhood. At a very young age he started working as a cobbler, and kept that profession. He lived, worked and played among Jews, but he and his family did not have social interactions with them.

Rhodes belonged to Italy from 1912 until March, 1948, when it was united with Greece. Jews lived harmoniously among the diverse Rhodes community - Christians, Turks and Italians. However there were tales told to the Christian children not to go close to Jewish homes because they'll put them in barrels with nails and drink their blood. That caused some worry among the children and prevent them from visiting Jewish families but did not hold them back in playing all together. The Jews were merchants and generally well off. They spoke three or four languages: Greek, Ladino, Italian and Turkish

He remembers specifically two families:

- Rahami, who had a small grocery store, and Michail had his store next to it. The Rahamis had a daughter, Rojine, who married an Italian officer. Rojine hid away and survived. Her whole family perished.
- Binou, who had a shoe store. The whole family perished

During their occupation, the Italians treated the people well. Later, when the Germans took over, from Sept. 1943 to May 1945, things deteriorated very quickly. Life was miserable and there was a lot of hunger. He remembers seeing occasionally dead people on the streets.

The Germans did not treat the Jews differently. Michael does not remember any Yellow Stars on their chests or at their homes and shops. There were rumors, however, that the Germans were mistreating the Jews elsewhere. All of a sudden, one day, the Germans went to the Jewish homes, and arrested them all. They kept them in a soccer field for a day or two, and then moved them to the hotel Soleil. From there, they disappeared. Michail does not know when and how they were transported. He does not know of anybody who came back, other than Rojine Rahami. He heard that there were few who got hidden away by Christian families and survived, but does not know who and how.

When the Jews left their homes, their Christian neighbors looted their home. They took anything they wanted, from clothes to utensils to furniture. They considered that rather natural, because the owners were gone and the looters "were poor people who needed

help". After a couple of days, the Christian neighbors trespassed and occupied the Jewish homes. Some of them still live there. Michael did both, and never considered anything wrong. His family took over a two-story house for some time. Eventually, he moved out of that one, and bought another Jewish home.